

OF THE
NATURE
OF
SUPERSTITION.

A
SERMON
PREACHED

At S^t Dunstons West,

March 31. MDC LXXXII.

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to His MAJESTY.

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COLOSS. 2. 23.

Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body, not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

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Saint Paul was now a Prisoner at Rome for the sake of the Gospel, when he wrote this Epistle to the *Colossians*, but his mind was at liberty; And the compass of his thoughts and cares was so far from being confined within the Walls of a Prison, that it reached not only to the Churches of *Asia* planted by himself, as those of *Ephesus* and *Galatia*; but to those which had never seen him, as the *Colossians* and *Laodiceans*. For, saith he, *I would that ye knew* Coloss. 2. 1. *what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in*
A 2 the

the flesh. Had not he trouble enough with the Churches of *Rome* and *Greece*, and those he had conversed with in other parts, but he must take upon him to interpose in the affairs of those Churches he had never seen? But such was the largeness of the Apostle's mind, the fervour of his Zeal, the extent of his Charity, that *the care of all the Churches was upon him*; but especially those which had been planted by his means, although not by his personal endeavours; among which, in all probability, this of the *Colossians* was

- Coloss. 1. 7. one. For this *Epaphras* whom St. Paul calls a faithful Minister of Christ to them, was employ'd as an Evangelist under him; and particularly in the Cities of *Laodicea*, *Hierapolis*, and *Colosse*, which were not far distant from each other in *Phrygia*; and for the Churches there settled, S. Paul testifies, that he had a mighty zeal and concernment:
4. 13. From whence it arose, that hearing of S. Pauls Imprisonment at *Rome*, he resolves to take a Journey thither to acquaint him with the State of those Churches, and to desire his Advice and Direction in the present danger they were in, of being seduced from the simplicity of the Gospel, by the plausible insinuations of false Teachers, who pretended to give them a more refined Systeme of Religion, by a composition of Law and Gospel and Philosophy all together. S. Paul understanding.

standing by him the dangerous circumstances they were in, although *Epaphras* himself was made a Fellow-Prisoner with him; as appears by the *Epistle to Philemon*, sent at the same time with this; yet he finds means by *Tychicus* and *Onesimus* to convey this *Epistle* to them. *Philem. 23.* Wherein by an admirable art of insinuation, far above the eloquent *exordiums* of the Heathen Orators, he lets them understand; how passionately he was concerned for their welfare; and what an *Agony* he suffered in his own breast for their sakes, lest under some artificial colours and very fair pretences, they should be drawn off from the Love and Unity and Sincerity of the Gospel. For after he had told them what conflict he had for them that had not seen his face in the flesh, he immediately adds, that it was, that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the Mystery of God and of the Father and of Christ. *Coloss. 2. 2, 3.* In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And when he hath thus set forth the excellency and sufficiency of the Gospel; he then lets fall an intimation of his design, *And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. V. 4.* But lest they should suspect from hence that ill offices had been done them, and they had been misrepresented to *S. Paul*; in the next verse he tells them, that at that distance,

he

- V. 5. *he did rejoice, beholding their order, and the stedfastness of their faith in Christ. And therefore exhorts them,*
- V. 6. *As they had received Christ Jesus the Lord, so to walk in him : i. e. to adhere to that faith which they at first embraced ; as he explains it, in the seventh Verse. Having thus removed all jealousy and suspicion as to their present stedfastness, he doth more openly address himself to them ; in giving them caution against the most dangerous and deceitful errors. Beware lest any man spoil you through Philosophy and vain deceit, after the Tradition of men, after the rudiments of the World, and not after Christ. Not as though there were the least prejudice to Christianity to be imagined by mens searching into the Works of God, or the Nature of Moral Actions, or the digesting our own thoughts or conceptions of things, which is all that is understood by true Philosophy ; but that the Model of Religion which they were in so much danger of being deceived by, was made up, partly of Philosophical Precepts, and partly of Jewish Traditions and ritual Observations ; by which the false Teachers endeavoured to corrupt and adulterate the Gospel of Christ. Accordingly in the following Discourse, the Apostle first disputes against the necessity of keeping the Ceremonies of the Law, now under the Gospel, and sums up the force of it, v. 17. Which are a shadow of things to come, but the*
- V. 8.

the body is of Christ. And having thus dispatched the hardest Question about the Obligation of the Law of Moses, he enters upon the debate about other Inventions, which they endeavoured to recommend to Christians.

(1.) About the *Worshipping of Angels*, as *Mediators* between God and Men; which was an Opinion then generally received among the corrupters of Christianity, the *Gnosticks* and *Judaizing Christians*; who were not so vain in their imaginations, to believe them to be *supreme and independent Deities*; for this they utterly denied; owning one only *supreme God the Father of all*: but they thought access to him was to be had by the *Mediation of Angels*, and therefore they brought in the *Worship of them*. *Baronius* indeed denies, that *A. D. 60.*
the *Gnosticks* introduced any *Worship of Angels*; but *n. 17.*
therein he is justly confuted by some late Writers *Christian.*
of the Roman Church. For *Tertullian* condemns *Lup. in Tertul. de praescript. c. 33.*
the *Gnosticks* for a *Magical Service of Angels*; and *Nat. Alex. Sec. 1. p. 52.*
Epiphanius saith, that their *impure Sacrifices* were *Tertull. de praescript. c. 33.*
posed to be offer'd up by Principalities and Powers, to *Epiph. har. 21. p. 58.*
the *supreme Father of all*. Which doth evidently
prove, that the *Gnosticks* did give *Worship to Angels as Mediators*. And although *Baronius* endeavours likewise to clear the *Cerinthians* from this guilt (lest the Church of Rome should be found to tread in their steps) because *Cerinthus* acknow- *Bar. ib. n. 20.*
ledged

n. 16.

ledged one supreme Power above Angels, and because he had a bad Opinion of the Angel which gave the Law; yet, why might not they worship the Angels as Mediators between that supreme Power and them; and even that Angel which gave the Law as well as the rest, since they contended for the necessary observation of the Law? But besides, all the Judaizing Christians were not followers of Cerinthus, there being different Sects among them; as appears by Irenæus; Epiphanius and others; and Baronius himself grants that the Pharisaical Jews of that and following Ages did Worship Angels as the Host of Heaven. And the Essens had their Angels of Prayer; and made their prayers to the rising Sun, whom they looked on as on the rest of the Stars, as animated and intelligent Beings. And why the Judaizing Christians should not retain their former Superstitions, as well as their other Traditions and Observations, I do not understand. Especially, since Theodoret so expressly affirms, that those who then pleaded for the keeping of the Law brought in the Worship of Angels, which custom, he saith, continued a long time in Phrygia and Pisidia; and at last the Council of Laodicea, made a Canon against praying to Angels.

Bell. de S. B.
c. 20.

Those of the Church of Rome are so sensible of the force of this Testimony of Theodoret against their practice, that they are driven to desperate shifts to avoid it. Bellarmine saith, that he speaks against

against the Gnosticks; whereas Theodoret mentions only those who were for keeping the Law. Baronius saith in plain terms, Theodoret was mistaken, and that there were no such Hereticks then; but this is so gross, that Bellarmin and others contradict him in it. Others therefore say, that the Worship of Angels here spoken against, is the Worshipping of them as Makers of the World. But that is more than St. Paul saith, for he speaks against that Worship which arises from Humility, and nothing so proper for that, as the Worshipping them as Mediators between God and us. Some think it is when Angels are preferred before Christ, which is likewise more than the Apostle saith; and they who chuse other Mediators, by whom God is more accessible by us, do prefer them in Use, though not in Dignity: Others, as the Jansenists in their New Testament, say it is, When Angels are set up as Mediators in opposition to Christ; but that cannot be the Apostles meaning; for then his great business would have been to have proved Christ to be the true Mediator, and not Angels; and if any Religious Worship of Angels had been agreeable with the Christian Doctrine, the Apostle would never have thus in general condemned it, but with such restrictions and limitations as made it to be evil. Therefore to avoid these difficulties, some conclude that by the Worship of Angels is understood such a Worship

Jansen. Preface Ep.
Aux. Coloss.

Chrys. in l.
Hier. Algas.
q. 10.

as was introduced by a pretended Revelation of Angels; but against this, we have the concurrent testimony of St. Chrysostome, St. Hierome, St. Ambrose, Oecumenius, Theophylact, who all agree that it is to be understood of the Worship given to Angels. So impossible it is for those who either give themselves, or justify and allow the giving by others, any Religious Worship to Angels, to escape falling under the Apostles censure, of being Seducers and corrupting the Gospel of Christ.

(2.) About stricter Abstinence and greater Severity of Life. For these Seducers gave out that the Christian Churches were yet very defective in this matter: And that there were several Societies of Men, both among the Jews and Heathens, which went very far beyond them: as the Essens, the Pythagoreans, the Gymnosophists and others; who far outstript the Christians in Watchings and Fastings, in the hard usage of their Bodies, and a total abstinence from Wine and Flesh, and other lawful Pleasures of Life. On which account these false Teachers represented the Christianity, as yet received in these Churches, as too soft and gentle an Institution, and not answering the Character that was given of it; but if they had a mind to set it off with advantage, it would be necessary for them to take in some of the strictest Precepts of those Societies, especially relating to Meats and

and Marriage, *Touch not, taste not, handle not* : which they magnified as the greatest Instances of true Religion, Self-denial, Humility, Mortification ; without which they despised the Christian Institution as a mean and ordinary thing, requiring only the belief of some great things done and suffered by *Jesus Christ* in *Judea*, and the adhering thereto till Death, and doing those Offices of Humanity and Kindness to each other, and those Duties of Religion to *God*, which all Mankind thought fit and reasonable to be done.

But these pretended refiners of Christianity, were not contented with such common things ; they must set up for something singular, and extraordinary ; so *Epiphanius* observes of the *Gnosticks* in the beginning, that they condemned Marriage, and abstained from *Flesh*, that under these pretences they might draw others into their snares. And likewise of the *Ebionites*, one of the Sects of *Judaizing Christians*, that they carefully abstained from all *Flesh*, and were every day Baptised, and celebrated the *Eucharist* only in *Water*, for fear of being defiled with the taste of *Wine* ; wherein they were followed by the *Encratites*, *Aquarij*, and several others, who affected something out of the way, as a badge of more than ordinary Sanctity. And there are scarce any of those who are mentioned as the Authors of great Mischief to the Church, but were

Epiph. Her.
23. p. 63.

Her. 30. p.
139.

Epiph. har.
47. p. 339.

remarkable for something of this Nature ; as appears by *Marcion, Montanus, Manicheus, Severus*, and others. And which is observable, this sort of singularity prevailed no where more, than in these parts of *Phrygia* ; where the *Encratite* very much encreased and continued so to do in the days of *Epiphanius*. So very little effect had this wise and timely caution, given by the Apostle in this place, upon those who were willing to be deceived in that, or following Generations.

Philo p. 876.

Epiph. p. 42.

V. 16.

Philo p. 877,
899.

Cajetan confesses himself to seek *what sort of Men those were the Apostle discourses against* ; but it seems most probable to me, that they were a sort of *Judaizing Christians*, who endeavoured to introduce the *Customs of the Jewish Essens* into the Christian Church. For when *St. Paul* speaks of the *Jewish Customs* he mentions no other, but such as were in esteem among them ; he takes no notice of *Sacrifices* which were disesteemed among them ; But let no man judge you in *Meat*, which among them was only *Bread and Salt* ; or in *Drink*, which was only *Water* ; or in respect of a *Holyday* or *New Moon*, or the *Sabbath Days* ; which as *Philo* relates, they were great observers of. And when he speaks of the *Customs* they would bring among the Christians, they were no other than such as were strictly observed among them, viz. *great abstinence, hard usage of their Bodies, and some Religious*

gious Rites with respect to Angels. Concerning which the Apostle delivers his Judgment two ways.

1. He grants that these things have a *shew of Wisdom in them*; i. e. that they make so good an appearance to men, as is apt to raise an esteem of those persons in whom it is. First, Because they seem to flow from a *forwardness in Religion*, so I render *ἑβελοθρησκεία*, which we call *Will-worship*; but that being a thing of an ill Name, doth not so well answer to the *shew of Wisdom*; for what *shew of Wisdom* is there in doing an ill thing? This is therefore a readiness of Mind to do any thing in Religion which men think pleasing to God, whether required by him or not. So *Hesychius* expounds *ἑβελοθρησκεία* by *ἑβελουσιβείαν*; and *ἑβελήμους* by *πρόθυμους*. And other Greek Words of a like composition, do imply no more than a *voluntary inclination*; as in *ἑβελουσιβεία*, which *Plato* useth for a *service out of good Will, and free Inclination*: *ἑβελόπορος* is the same with *φιλόπορος* and *φιλοκίνδυνος* in *Xenophon*: And *St. Augustine* observes, that in his time, a Man that affected to be Rich, was called *Thelo-dives*, and he that desired to be thought Wise *Thelo-sapiens*; so according to this Analogy, a Man that would be thought very Religious, would then have been called *Thelo-Religiosus*; taking *Religiosus* in the sense of *Massurius Sabinus*,
and

Plato Sym.

Xen.

Cyr. Pad. 2.

Aug. Ep. 59.

A. Gell. l. 4. c. 9.

and not of *Nigidius Figulus*: i. e. in a good, and not in a bad sense. And so *Ἐπιλοθρησκεία*, is a desire of appearing more Religious than ordinarily; which is not a thing evil in it self, but depends on circumstances. The next is *ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη*, *Humility*, a Vertue so graceful, so becoming Mankind, with a respect to God and to each other, that whatever makes a *Shew* of that, doth so of *Wisdom* too. The third is *ἡ ἀπειρία σώματος*, not sparing the Body, but using it with hardship to keep it under. *ἐκ ὧν τῆς τῆς πρὸς πλυσμὸν τῆς σαρκός.* Which Words have such a hardness in their construction, as hath caused great variety of interpretations; which I shall not repeat. That which seems most natural, is, that *Honour* implies a regard to the Body; and so it only explains what was meant by *ἀπειρία*; the sense being, not with any regard to the Flesh for its satisfaction: which hath a farther appearance of Wisdom, not barely in the subjection of the Body to the Mind; but as it seems to argue a Mind so elevated above the Body, that it hath little or no regard to the necessities of it.

2. Notwithstanding all this fair *shew* of Wisdom, the *Apostle* doth really condemn these things as not pleasing to God, nor suitable to the Christian Religion. For,

(1.) He saith they have only a *shew* of Wisdom.

dom. λόγος, φρόνη, ἡ δύναμις ἀγαθὴ ἐκ ἀληθείας, saith St. Chrysostome, who certainly understood the force of the Words; the *shew*, saith he, *not the Power, therefore not the Truth of Wisdom.* Imaginem rationis, humaneque sapientie, saith St. Jerom. ὁρμηξ ἐκ ἀληθείας, saith Theodoret; so that notwithstanding the fair *Shew* they make, they have no real *Wisdom* in them.

(2.) This new way of Worship, though it hath such a specious *shew of Devotion and Humility*; yet it reflects on the Honour of Christ, as Mediator; and therefore the Apostle charges the introducers of it, with *not holding the Head*. If the Cerintbians did advance the *Angels* above Jesus Christ, they were so much the more guilty; but if these *Judaizers* did only look on them as nearer and more agreeable *Mediators* to us, yet therein they brought a great disparagement upon him, whose Office it was to be the *sole Mediator between God and Men*. Mankind was very excusable in comparison, for finding out other *Mediators*, before God had declared to the World that he had appointed his Son to be our only *Advocate and Intercessor*; but for those who own his *Mediatorship*, to make choice of others besides Him, is to call in question the *Wisdom of the Father, or the Sufficiency, Interest or Kindness of the Son*. For if God hath appointed him for this end, and he be able

able to go through his work, and willing to help all that address themselves to him; what need to call in other Assistants? yea, what a Dishonour is it for him to stand by, and Applications be made to them to do that Office, which he was appointed alone to discharge?

(3.) These new inventions though never so plausible, are a disparagement to the Gospel, as not containing sufficient, or at least not the most sublime and perfect directions for *Humility* and *Mortification*. For our *Blessed Saviour* was so far from being remarkable for these affected singularities, that the freedom and easiness of his conversation, was a great offence to those who understood little or nothing of Religion beyond these things. *The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a Man Gluttonous, and a Wine-bibber, a friend of Publicans and Sinners.* Not that he gave way to any thing like *Luxury*, or *Intemperance*, who was the most exact pattern of all true and real Vertues; but because they saw nothing extraordinary as to the severity of his Life in these Matters, they looked on him but as one of the common sort of men, making no appearance of more than usual Sanctity, as to eating and drinking. And when *Johns Disciples* who were bred up with greater austerity, were really offended that *Christs Disciples* did not

Matt. 12.
19.

not fast as they did: our Saviour puts them off with a Parabolical Answer; *Can the Children of the Bride-chamber fast, as long as the Bridegroom is with them?* which answer might puzzle them more, as not understanding why fasting should be inconsistent with his corporal Presence; yet to let them see that he did not look on *Fasting*, as a *Duty* unsutable to his Religion, he tells them, the Days would come, when his Disciples should have their times of Fasting. *But the Days will come when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.* So that it is not *Occasional* or *Anniversary* Days of Fasting, which are condemned here by the Apostle, as *Will-worship*, or neglecting the Body; but the imposing a new and severer course of Life upon Christians, as a way of greater perfection of *Mortification*, than what was required by Christ or his Apostles. This is that which the Apostle calls *being subject to Ordinances*; and living after the *Commandments and Doctrines of Men*. Theodoret observes that he doth not mean the Law by this, but the *unseasonable Doctrine of these Seducers*; and it is evident from the foregoing part of the 20. v. *Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the World: i. e. if ye are freed from the Yoke of the Law*, what reason is there ye should submit to another, which depends only on the Authority and invention of Men? But what then? Doth

Matt. 9. 12,
13.

V. 20.

C

S. Paul

S. Paul make it unlawful to submit to any Orders or Rites appointed by the Church in which we live? By no means. For neither doth the Apostle speak of those who had lawful Authority, but of Seducers; nor doth he speak of things appointed merely for Order and Decency; but of such things which are supposed by the Imposers to have more of true Perfection and Sanctity in them; more Humility and Mortification; and consequently to be more pleasing to God, than bare obedience to the Precepts of Christ and his Apostles. Whoever introduce any such things into the Christian Church, and maintain any such opinions of them, are justly censured by the Apostle here, and fall under the condemnation of Seducers.

(4.) These things, whatsoever shew of Wisdom and Humility they make, are really the effects of Pride and Folly.

(1.) Of Pride: which appears,

1. By a great presumption of their great Skill and Knowledge in the Mysteries of Religion, and of what is most pleasing to God; Intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind. So that here was a great outward appearance of Humility and Mortification; but within nothing but Pride and Vanity. It hath been long observed, that those who strive to exceed others in the outward shews and appearances of

Humility

Humility and neglect of the Body, have been most liable to the Temptations of *Spiritual Pride*; i. e. to a high opinion of themselves, and a contempt of others; which they have manifested by an invincible stiffness in maintaining their own opinions; a readiness to impose them upon others; and impatience of contradiction from any.

2. By an affectation of greater *Humility*, than appears in others. These Seducers, we see, pretended to nothing more than *Humility*. Their *Worship of Angels* was from *Humility*; their neglect of the *Body* from *Humility* too: they made so much shew of it, as gave reason to suspect *Pride* lay at the bottom. For it is more real *Humility* to be contented to be thought *Proud* unjustly, than to labour for such an opinion of more than ordinary *Humility*, as these Seducers did.

(2.) Of *Folly*; in two things.

1. In placing the main of their Religion in things that would not bear the weight of it, which the Apostle intimates in those Words, *Which all are to perish with the using*: i. e. as the Greek Interpreters explain it, the matters of eating and drinking are no such great things, that so much ado should be made about them. For as our Saviour saith, *Not that which goeth into the Mouth defileth a Man; for it goeth into the Belly, and is cast out into the draught.* And therefore saith the Apostle, *The Kingdom of*

V. 22.

Vid. Theod. Theophyl.

Matt. 15.

11. 17.

Rom. 14.

God 17, 18.

God is not Meat and Drink, but Righteousness and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost; for he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of Men.

2. In supposing the following their own *Inventions* to be more pleasing to God, than the observing his own Commands. For this seems to be at the bottom of all; these Seducers made no question, but they had found out ways much more pleasing to God, than those which were in common esteem and practice in the Christian Churches. So that which is called here *ἐκ' ἑλεσθησκειᾶς*, is by the Latins rendered in *Superstitione*: i. e. in an opinion of pleasing God by some particular Rites of their own; in making much of their Religion to lye in forbearing some things and doing others, which God never required, and are made no parts of the Christian Religion by Christ or his Apostles. So that here are two parts of the *Superstition* here spoken of.

1. Forbearing some things as *unlawful*, which God never made *unlawful* by any prohibition, *Touch not, taste not, handle not*. The root of their *Superstition* did not lie, as some imagin, in *supposing the things which they did forbear as in themselves abominable, as some Hereticks did*; but in an opinion, that God would be so much pleased with the meer forbearance of them, that those who
design

design to please God, were bound to abstain from them, although he had never forbidden them. And there is a material difference between these three things. (1.) Abstaining from things as in themselves unlawful to be used. (2.) Preferring the Abstinence before the Use, on some particular Seasons and Occasions. (3.) Making the forbearance of them as unlawful (though not forbidden) as necessary to the pleasing of God. There were such who did utterly forbid the use of *Marriage* and *Meats*, of whom the Apostle speaks, 1 Tim. 4. 3. And the Christian Church, as S. *Augustine* observes, doth not fall under this censure of the Apostle, when in some cases it prefers Abstinence from both. *Ille prohibet, saith he, qui hoc malum esse dicit, non qui huic bono, aliud melius anteponit.* But yet there may be a *Superstitious Abstinence*, without that Superstitious opinion; or else the Christian Church had no reason to condemn the *Abstinence* of the *Montanists*, who, as *Tertullian* pleads for them, utterly rejected that opinion. Neither was it merely because *Montanus* wanted *Authority* to make *Laws* of *Abstinence*. But *Tertullian* acquaints us with other arguments against it, chiefly from the unsuitableness of it to the design of Christianity. And to impose such *Abstinence* as necessary to the pleasing God, is that which the Church condemned in

Montanus 33

Aug. c. Faust. l. 3 c. 6.

Tert. de Jej. c. 15.

Montanus; and the believing it is a *Superstitious* opinion; though of another sort from that which made the Use of them in it self *unlawful*. For they did it upon an extravagant fancy, that no living Creatures were of Gods making, but were produced by some other powers in opposition to him; as appears by the *Gnosticks*, the *Marcionists*, the *Manichæes*, and the *Enkratitæ*. But the same reason could not hold as to those *Judaizing Christians*, who believed the World and all living Creatures were produced by the Power of God. For *Irenæus* saith, that the *Ebionites* did hold that God was the Maker of the World; and therein they differ'd from the *Cerinthians*, as well as in some other opinions; yet these *Ebionites* pretended to be *Christians*, and universally abstained from Flesh, as *Epiphanius* saith: not that they had any reason to account Flesh abominable; but they had learnt from the *Essens* to abstain from it, and thought it greater Sanctity so to do.

*Iren. l. 1.
c. 26.*

*Epiph. har.
30. p. 139.*

2. Their *Superstition* did lie in supposing that God would be mightily pleased with their doing some things of their own invention, as the *Worship of Angels* was; which was so far from being commanded by God in the *Law of Moses*, that they had thence many arguments against it: but notwithstanding they thought there was so much of *Humility* and *Complement to God Almighty* in it, that he could not but be very much pleased with it.

it. And when men lay a great weight of Religion upon *doing or forbearing things*, neither commanded nor forbidden by the Law of God, that is so far from being a pleasing Worship of God, that it deserves no other name but that of *Superstition* and *Will-worship*; as they do imply a *shew of Wisdom*, without the *Truth and Power* of it.

But here arises the main difficulty; “How shall we put a difference between what is pleasing to God, and what is not; or between true Religion and Superstition? For since the Apostle implies that some things may have a *shew of Wisdom* in them, *i. e.* may seem pleasing to God, which are not so; and other things may be more pleasing to God, which do not make such a *shew of Wisdom* to Men; it seems to be a matter of as great difficulty as concernment to us, to understand the just and true bounds between *Religious* and *Superstitious Worship*.

This is an enquiry of so great moment and consequence, for the easing our minds of many troublesome doubts and fears, and settling in them a true notion of Religion; that I shall from hence apply my self to the consideration of the true difference between the *reasonable Worship of God*, and *Superstition*.

Superstition in the general, is nothing else but an *unpleasing Worship of God*. I do not speak of that *Worship* which relates to a *false object*; which

is

is more properly *Idolatry*; but when that *Worship* is ultimately referred to a *true Object*, as in the *Worship of Angels as Mediators*, then it is *Superstition* too; it being an undue way of giving *Worship* to the *true God*. I shall not trouble my self with an enquiry into the *Etymology* of the words in *Greek* or *Latin*, it being well observed by *Aquinas*, that in this matter we are not so much to observe the *Etymology* of *Superstition*, as the use of the *Word*. And that hath been different according to mens notions concerning *Religion*.

Aq. 2. 2. q. 92.

Tan. Fabr. Not. p. 294.

Leviath. ch. 6. ch. 11.

Those who believed no *God* at all, or at least no *Providence*, accounted all *Religion* to be nothing but *Superstition*. And it is a weak and silly *Apology* a late *Commentator* on *Lucretius* makes for his saying, so much mischief hath been done by *Religion*; by *Religion*, saith he, he meant *Superstition*; for he accounted all *Religion* to be nothing else but *Superstition*. And those in our Age, who can find no other difference between them; but that one is allowed, and the other not; or one is what we like, and the other what we dislike; do destroy any real difference between them; and make only *Religion* a *Superstition* in fashion; and *Superstition* a *Religion* out of fashion. Whereas if there be a *God* and *Providence*, there must be such a thing as *true Religion*: i. e. there ought to be some *Acts* in us agreeable to the *Conceptions* we have of the *Divine*

vine Nature. For, His Majesty and Power requires our Fear; not an amazing, confounding, unaccountable Fear, arising from a perplexity and disorder of our imaginations; but a just, reasonable, prudent Fear, springing from our most serious thoughts and deepest consideration of things. For, if it be impossible for any thinking man to satisfy himself in the train of Causes, but he must come to this thought at last, that there is some Cause, whereof there is no former Cause, but is Eternal; which is that we call God; then it is impossible if this man pursues his own thoughts, but the first Consequence from hence will be, that if this God be the first cause of all things, his Power and Majesty is so great, as to command a due Reverence and Fear from us his Creatures. This is not such a Fear as Men have in a storm, or when a sudden calamity seizeth upon them, which makes them at their wits end, and to run they know not whither for present help; but it is a settled, calm, composed temper of mind; a Fear without consternation; an Awe and Reverence of the Divine Majesty, without terrour and astonishment. For, as the mighty Power of God begets fear in us, so the infinite Goodness and Wisdom of God, not only keep up mens minds from sinking into slavish Fear, and horrible despair; but fills them with comfortable hopes, and a patient and humble Trust

and Confidence in his never-failing Providence. And this is the *Nature of true Religion* in the Minds of Men.

But because it tends to the honour of our Maker, and the encouraging one another to Acts of Piety and Devotion, that this inward sense of our Minds be expressed by such external Actions as are agreeable thereto, from thence came the necessity of the publick Offices of Religion, wherein we offer up our Prayers and Praises to the Divine Majesty in acknowledgment of our Dependence upon him for what we have, or are, or hope for. And there is nothing in all this, but what is highly just and reasonable, and this is *true natural Religion*.

But then we cannot deny, that there is too great a natural proneness in Mankind to *Superstition*. For, when men cannot shake off the apprehension of a Deity, and yet are conscious to themselves that they have offended him; the very thoughts of him prove so uneasie to them, that they would be glad to believe there were none at all, and give all the advantage to Atheistical Objections which a willing mind can do: And as *Plutarch* observes of Superstitious Men, *they would be Atheists if they durst*. But finding still an inward dissatisfaction, and an impossibility of rooting out the fears of a Deity; the

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next thing is, to think upon some ways to please him, and to mitigate his displeasure against them. And we can hardly imagine any thing so pompous and ceremonious, so mean and servile, so cruel and barbarous, so ridiculous and foppish, but Mankind have made use of it to atone the anger of their Gods. For, the first effect of *Superstition*, on Mens minds, was; that they durst not make immediate *Applications* to the *Supreme Being*, as being too great and powerful for them: therefore they pitched on some inferiour Beings to mediate, and to offer up their Devotions and Sacrifices to him, whom they thought it too great presumption to approach. When thus *Superstition* in the most proper sense of *δυνάμειος* had in a great measure supplanted *true Religion* in the World; then it proceeded to find out such ways and methods of Worship, as they thought would be most pleasing to these inferiour Deities. They erected Temples and Altars to them, and set out their Images with all the Art and Splendor they were capable of; and upon extraordinary Occasions they were carried with wonderful Pomp and Solemnity through the Streets, all Orders of Men attending them with Supplications and Prayers and costly Sacrifices to avert their Wrath and Displeasure. And they were not content with promiscuous Sacrifices, but they studied by all possible means to

find out what *Sacrifices* would please them best; if they fancied it must be something very dear and precious to them, they stuck not at offering up their very children to appease them; and contrived by loud Musick to stop their ears from hearing the hideous cries of their Children while they were roasting in the flames. And in their ordinary Sacrifices, they were extremely scrupulous, lest any spot or blemish, or number, or unfit season, or so much as colour should be displeasing to the Gods they offered them to: some must have white and uneven; others black and even sacrifices; some must have their Sacrifices offered at the rising, some at the setting of the Sun; some must have one sort of Beasts, and some another; and some no less than Mans flesh would satisfy; which inhumane Sacrifices, on some occasions, did almost universally obtain, before the Christian Religion prevailed in the World. But again, other Deities were presumed to be so nice and squeamish, that nothing was to be offered them but Milk, and Wine, and Honey, and some Fruits of the Earth. It were infinite to relate the Rites and Customs of their Sacrifices, and all the ways they used to please their Gods, and to find out whether they were pleased or not; by the posture, the tongue, the entrails of their Beasts; by the flying of Birds, the feeding of Chickens, the fall-
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ing of a staff, the holes of a sieve, &c. and innumerable ways of Divination, by which they flatter'd themselves that they understood the good Will and Pleasure of their Gods, which did not so much satisfy their curiosity, as fill them with perpetual fears, and oppress them with the horrible Bondage of *Superstition*; which exalted almost every thing to the honour of a Deity, and made themselves miserable by seeking to please them.

But although this were the deplorable state of Mankind, forsaken of God and left to their own inventions; yet such is the weakness and folly of Men, that when God himself had given a *Law* to the *Israelites* to regulate their Worship, with as much condescension to their weakness, as the Wisdom of his Laws would permit; yet so great was the Witchcraft of *Superstition*, that they were always almost hankering after the *Dotage* of their neighbour Nations. And although they often smarted severely for it; yet the rod was no sooner off, but they were ready to return to their former *Superstitious vanities*, and were so obstinately bent upon them, that nothing could move them; not their former experience; not the unreasonableness of the thing; not the terrible denunciations of Gods heavy judgments against them; till at last, when there was no remedy,
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the whole People were carried into Captivity; from whence the greatest part never returned, and their very memory is lost by a mixture with other Nations. Those who returned, have been so wise ever since, as to abhor that provoking sin of *Idolatry*; which their Ancestors suffered so much for: but by degrees they fell into other kinds of *Superstitions*. For it was thought a mean thing among them to keep to the Law; but the *Traditions* of their *Elders* were looked upon as precious things; and happy was the Man that was strictest in the observance of them. Their frequent Washings, their additional Fastings and Prayers, their Garments, their Postures, their very Looks had such an appearance of Sanctity above other Mens; that a man who kept only to the Law, was of no regard or esteem for Piety and Devotion.

This was the *state of Religion* among the Jews when Christ appeared; who laid open the sophery and hypocrisie of these great pretenders to extraordinary Sanctity. He directed men to the love of God and their Neighbours, as the main substantial parts of true Religion. And next to his making a propitiation for the sins of Mankind by the Sacrifice of himself, his great end was to restore true Religion to the World, which had been so long buried under the heap of *Superstitions*.
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And there needed so great an Authority as his was, to assure Mankind, that nothing was so pleasing and acceptable to God, as unaffected Piety, and universal Goodness; which comprehends under it all the Duties of Temperance, Righteousness and Charity. And it is one great Argument of the Providence of God watching over his Church, that he hath caused the Discourses of our *Blessed Saviour* to be preserved by the *Writings* of the *Evangelists*; without which in all likelihood, the Christian Religion had been long since lost in the World. For the *Jewish Christians* who corrupted Christianity; had represented St. Peter as so favourable to them; and so misrepresented St. Paul; that unless Christs Doctrine had been preserved in his own words, and that by the concurrent Testimony of different Writers, the Christian Religion had preserved little more than its name in the World.

And yet with all this advantage, such was still the fondness of Mankind for their own *Inventions*, that even under the Apostles eyes, most of the Churches began to be tainted with these corruptions; partly by the *Judaizing Christians*; and partly by the followers of Simon and Menander. But they all agreed in something new and mysterious, and more pleasing to God, than the dull and common way of Faith and Obedience. After
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the *Apostles* decease, the corruptions still multiplied, and any new pretence to *Revelations* and *Mysteries*, especially being joined with greater *Abstinence* and *severity of Life*, took wonderfully among weak and injudicious Christians, and made them apt to despise the *Churches Devotions*, as too cold and flat, and not having that *Life and Spirit*, that *Strictness* and *Austerity* which appeared among the new pretenders. What disturbance on this account did the Spirit of *Montanus* give to the Churches of *Phrygia*, *Galatia*, and *Cappadocia*? The meer pretence to *Revelation* had never done it, had it not been for the stricter Laws of *Fasting* and *Mortification*, and greater *Severity* of Discipline than was used in the *Catholick Church*. It was this which made *Tertullian* swallow the bait he had despised before; and the force of all his Arguments against the Church is, we are stricter than you. But notwithstanding all these pretences, the Christian Church still kept it self within its bounds, making nothing necessary to Salvation, but what Christ and his Apostles had made so; yet recommending the Practice of *Fasting*, as there were just *Occasions*, especially before the great solemnity of *Easter*; wherein both the *Sacraments* were administred with more than ordinary *Devotion*, and the *Penitents* reconciled to the *Communion* of the Church.

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If we look at this day into the *state* of the *Christian World*; how great a part of it is relapsed into almost *Heathen Superstitions*, in the *Worship of Images*, and *Saints*, and *Angels* as *Mediators*? and no great difference in the outward *Solemnities* and *Processions*, save that their *Sacrifices* are turned into a *Consecrated Wafer*, which is carried in *Procession*, as the *Heathen Gods* were wont to be. It is true, there are great pretences to *Will-worship*, and *Humility*, and neglecting the *Body* in several *Orders of Men*; and those are looked on as ways of *greater perfection*, than living in the *World*, and doing good in it. Which we have no reason to think agreeable to the *Doctrine of Christ* or our *Apostle* here. But where there is not only *Sanctity* and *Merit*, placed in such observations, but *Supererogation* too, they flatly contradict *S^t Paul*; for if that be true, these things have far more than the *shew of Wisdom*; for what wiser thing can any man do, than not only to provide for his own *Salvation*, but for others too?

In the *Eastern Churches*, the best part, I fear, of their remaining *Christianity*, lies in the strict observing the *Fasts* and *Feasts* of the *Church*. They mightily despise the *Fasting* practised in the *Roman Church*, as not deserving the name of *Fasting*, because they end it at noon, and allow *Wine* and *Fish* for their repasts. Although it is said

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that

Mich. Nau. that of late the Greeks break the strict Fast at noon ;
Eccel. Græc. but in St. Chrys. and St. Basil's time they account
Effig. p. 260. ed it no Fast wherein they did not totally abstain till night.
Basil. hom. de jejun. The more Eastern Christians allow neither Fish,
Chris. hom. 6. nor Wine, nor Oyl in their Lents, and they keep more
ad Pop. Antioch. in the Year than the Latin Church *.

* *V. Job. Ludolph. Hist. Æthiop. l. 3. c. 6. n. 81.* Thom. à Jesu de Convers. omnium Gent. l. 7. c. 18. Cotovic. Itiner. Hierosolymit. & Syriac. p. 207. Franc. Quaræsm. Elucid. Terra Sancta l. 1. c. 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58. Eustrat. Zialouski de Eccles. Orient. Græc. p. 39. Metroph. Critopol. c. 18. Haud scio, inquit Methodius Græcus (apud Mich. Nau. in Eccles. Græcæ effigie Dial. 13.) unde factum sit ut vos Latini à reliquis Christianorum Nationibus, sic in jejuniando recesseritis, ut nulla vobis nè Maronitana quidem, qua tota vestra est, consentiat. Jejunatis sabbato, feriâ 4. Non abstinetis ab esu Carnium; pisces, & quibusdam in locis, lactinia, quadragesimali tempore comeditis, solvitis meridiæ jejunium, &c.

In the Church of England, which approacheth nearest of any in the World to the Primitive Church, the Duty of Fasting is recommended upon its true Grounds, not as though there were any peculiar Sanctity or Merit in it, which are Superstitious Conceits, but to keep the Body in Subjection to the Spirit. It lays no snares upon the Consciences of Men; it gives no Countenance to hypocritical pretences to Fasting; but it sets before us the example and practice of the Primitive Church, and according to the temper and Moderation then used, leaves per-

sons to judge of their own strength, occasions, times, manner and degrees of Fasting; excepting the Fast on good Friday or the true Antepaschal Fast (which some kept longer than others) which Ter-

tullian

tullian saith, was universally observed by the Christian Church, as a necessary Fast, and had been so from the Apostles times; but as to other times a greater liberty was allowed,

Lexus ac liber modus abstinendi

Ponitur cunctis; neque nos severus

*Terror impellit; sua quemque cogit
velle Potestas.*

Prudent. 1. Cath. hymn. post jejun. V. Tert. de jejun. c. 2. 13. Hier. ep. 54. ad Marcel. Aug. c. Faust. Manich. l. 30. c. 5. ad Casul. Ep. 86. Epiph. in Expos. fidei Cath. n. 23. Socr. l. 5. c. 22. Vultor. Antioch. in Marc. 2. Cassian. Coll. 21. c. 30.

Yet even this Church, that is so wise, so moderate, cannot escape the charge of Will-worship and Superstition, for the Orders that are observed in it. But wherein is it that we are liable to this charge? Do we make the Orders of the Church any parts of our Religion? Or think that God is any otherwise displeased with others violation of them, than as it argues a froward, restless, unpeaceable Spirit? But what is it then? God, say they, hath not commanded these things, therefore they are Will-worship and Superstition.

This is an Objection, which for the honour of our Church I must remove, before I proceed to what remains. The true Case among us is this, The Church appoints such Orders to be observed in it, which have no expresse command in Scripture; some utterly refuse them as unlawful, though no where forbidden in Scripture; the Question is,

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Whether

Whether of these two sorts, those who practise according to these Orders, or those who utterly refuse, are liable to the charge of *Will-worship* and *Superstition*?

To clear this, we must state the notion of *Will-worship* and *Superstition* as they are here used by the Apostle, and then apply it to the present Case.

(1.) *Will-worship* I have shew'd, is nothing but a forwardness to do something that relates to the pleasing of God; and is said by the Apostle to have a *shew of Wisdom*, and therefore can be no more evil in it self, than *Humility*, or *neglecting the Body*; but whether it be good or evil is to be determin'd by circumstances.

(2.) Those circumstances which make it ill are, when men make those things a *part* of their Religion, which God hath neither commanded nor forbidden; and think God is pleased with their meer doing or abstaining from doing them, and this is true *Superstition*. For there are two things necessary to the *Notion* of it.

1. That the matter about which it is conversant relate to the *pleasing of God*. *Superstition* I grant, hath been taken by *Plutarch* and others from him, for a *dreadful apprehension of the Deity*; but that is rather the *foundation of Superstition*, than the definition of it. For a *Superstitious Man* doth

doth both think God to be angry without just cause, and beyond reason ; and to be pleased again without reason. If he thought God inexorable upon his Displeasure, he must presently despair ; but because he thinks he may be easily pleased again, therefore he bethinks himself in what way he may best do it ; and so devises several ways of his own, and useth any means suggested by others, though never so unreasonable in themselves, in hopes to please God by them. Thence *Plutarch* mentions such Mens, αλλοιότους προσκυνήσεις, *uncouth ways of Worship* ; and he observes, that at the same time, κολακεύουσιν ἡ λοιδορεῖσιν, *they flatter and reproach God* ; they think unworthily of him, as of one that is μικρόθυμος *very easily provoked* ; and yet that he is εύμεταβολός, *as easily changed* ; and that is the reason why a Superstitious fear puts men upon finding out any ways and methods to please him, though never so unreasonable ; for they looking upon God as a peevish, angry, humourfome Being, they have no certain Rule to judge what will please him, and therefore follow their own fancy and imagination about it.

2. That they be mistaken in their judgment concerning what they believe to be pleasing to God, that is, that they judge that to be so, which really is not. So *Superstition* is an excess or overdoing

doing in the matter of Worship; that which doth *modum legitimum cultus superstare & excedere*, saith *Vossius*; which *Etymology* he thinks much better than any other. *Cicero* saith, that Religion is *pius cultus*, Superstition *timor inanis Deorum*; i. e. one is a reasonable, the other an unreasonable Worship. So *A. Gellius* saith, it is *inepta & importuna Religio*; a foolish and troublesome Religion. *Festus* applies it to those things which are done, *præter morem Civitatis*; against the Custom prescribed by Law. As those of the Church of Rome do, to things done against the commands of the Church; and so not fasting upon Saturdays, and fasting upon Sundays are both Superstitious in their account; but all the Trumpery of the Mass, and Follies of their Worship are by no means Superstitious, because required by the Church. Which however helps us with a good argument to prove that the Worship of Images, and Saints, and Angels are required by their Church; or else by their own confession they must be Superstitious. But their Divines do all agree with *Aquinas*, that men may be guilty of Superstition in the Worship of the true God; i. e. when men make choice of something unfit or unreasonable to express their Worship of God. And *Suarez* quotes *Cajetan*, as allowing this Text to be extended to all Superstitious Worship not founded in right reason. And *Cajetan* upon the place saith, that

Voss. Etym.
Cic. l. 1. de
N. D.

Fest. v. Religios.

Aq. 2. 2. q.
92. Art. 2. q.
98. Art. 3.

Suarez de
Rel. tr. 3. l.
2. c. 1.

that although they have a *shew of Wisdom*; yet not in any honour, saith he, i. e. they deserve no esteem, being only for the satisfying of the flesh: i. e. of a carnal desire as to these external observations.

(3.) The Superstition here condemned, lay in the supposing God to be pleased with the forbearance of lawful things; touch not, taste not, handle not. Which if we understand either of Meats or Marriage, was a forbearance of things in themselves lawful; but they supposed God would be far better pleased with their forbearance of them. I do not say, it is Superstition for any man to abstain from doing what he apprehends to be unlawful by vertue of a general command: For that is a Moral Duty, and obedience to those places of Scripture which bid us abstain from all kind and appearance of evil. But yet it is plain here was a *Negative Superstition* in the forbearance of lawful things: And so it was in the dispute between Christ and the Pharisees about healing on *Matt. 12.* the Sabbath Day; they thought it unlawful: *10. 12.* Christ declares it to be lawful to do good on the Sabbath Days. Here was no positive observance on the Pharisees part; Yet here was Superstition in them; and therefore the true notion of Superstition doth extend to the forbearance of things in themselves lawful as displeasing to God.

But how shall we know, when such a forbearance is Superstitious? By

By these Rules :

Fresh Suit, p.
101.

1. If such a forbearance be thought to bring some special honour to God. For then, even Dr. Ames himself grants it to be Superstition, to abstain from lawful things though accounted unlawful by the Persons who abstain ; when some singular service and honour is by that abstinence intended : For then he grants it to be a kind of Ceremonious Worship. The question then is, when this case happens ; for our Abstinence from Popish or Mahumetan Superstitions, is not any special Act of Service, or Honour to God. But if we lived where those Acts of Worship were required by lawful Authority ; and we refused to comply with them, that would be a special Act of Honour and Worship to God ; it being a declaration of our Minds, that we thought God dishonoured by such Acts, and therefore durst not comply with them. It was once a great Question among the Papists, whether they might lawfully come to our Churches, or not ; and if not to our Prayers and Sacraments, yet to our Sermons, to avoid the severe Penalties of the Laws. And after great debate both by a Committee of the Council of Trent, and afterwards at Rome ; it was resolved in the Negative, upon this Reason, because in our Circumstances, it was *signum distinctivum cultûs*, a mark of distinction as to Religious Worship, and therefore it was an Act of special

cial honour and service to God to forbear. To abstain from pouring out Wine, and throwing Incense in the fire, is in it self no Act of Worship; but when the Heathen Emperours commanded the Christians to do it, in token of compliance with their Religion; their abstaining then from it, was a singular Act of Worship to God. So in the present Case, when men are required by lawful Authority, to do things which in themselves are lawful, to testify their union and conjunction with us in Religion; their refusal in this Case is a special *Act of Worship*; and being without Ground, is nothing else but *Superstition*.

2. When men value and esteem themselves as more holy and more in the favour of God on the account of such forbearance. As the *Pharisees* did on the account of their *Traditions*, who believed that God had no such people upon Earth as they were; and despised others who were far nearer to the Kingdom of God than themselves, as mere *Publicans* and *Sinners*. And it is very natural to Mankind to set a great value upon themselves, for the sake of their affected singularities in Religion; and in a transport of pride and vanity, to tell God himself, as the Pharisee did, *That they are not like other Men*: But this is a certain sign, whatsoever they pretend, that they look on the forbearance of the things which o-

thers do, as a part of *Holiness*; and if they do so, it is undoubtedly *Superstition*. For, on this ground we charge the *Papists* with *Superstition* in their *Ceremonies*, because they place holiness in them. It is true, they say they are the Instruments to convey some degrees of holiness to them; but this makes no material difference; for those who account themselves more in God's esteem for the sake of such things, do attribute some real efficacy to such distinctive Characters of themselves, as to the obtaining the favour of God.

3. When they forbear necessary Duties of Religion rather than comply with others in lawful things, as Communion with the Church they live in, in Prayers and Sacraments: which cannot be denied to be necessary Duties; but if men resolve rather to forbear these, than to join in such Ceremonies and Prayers as do accompany the performance of them, it is a sign they prefer the following their own imaginations before the joining in Communion with the Church in the most unquestionable Duties of Religion: As in the Case of the *Encratites* of old, who thought it unlawful to taste of Wine; and therefore refused to communicate in the Eucharist, unless they might have it in Water alone. Was not this a great *Superstition* in them, rather to forbear communicating with the Church, than not to observe their own fancies
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in what they thought most pleasing to God, as to the manner of doing it?

Now to apply this to our own Case.

We are often blamed for laying too great weight on the *Ceremonies* of this Church. But certainly, never any Church laid less weight upon its own Orders, supposing that it believes them to be just and reasonable. It places no *holiness*, no *merit*, no *efficacy* in them, as to the obtaining the Grace and Favour of God: It expects obedience only for Order and Peace-sake; It hath taken great care by *Prefaces* and *Canons* and *Rubrics*, to prevent any misinterpretation of its intention and design.

But on the other side, those who dissent from us, lay so great weight on their scruples, that they will rather hazard breaking a Church in pieces, ruining our Religion by our differences, losing all the benefit of Communion with a Church, whose Doctrine they approve in all the Duties of religious Worship; than they will yield to the allowance of those circumstances of our Communion which our Church requires. And now on which side the charge of *Superstition* more justly lyes, let all that are impartial judge.

So much I thought necessary on this Occasion to speak, in vindication of our Church from this common imputation of *Superstition*, by those who so little understand what it means.

Nothing now remains, but to make *Application* of all to our selves. You see how much mischief the *shew of Wisdom* was like to do in the *Apostolical Churches*; let us all have a care of being deceived by it. It was long since observed by *Menander*,

*To wit: That things which were like Truth
were more easily believed by the gene-*

That things which were like Truth
were more easily believed by the gene-
rality of Mankind, than Truth it self. So I am afraid it is about Religion, which is the *Wisdom* here spoken of, that which makes a great *shew* of it to the World, is more apt to prevail among persons of weak and well disposed Minds than true Wisdom. For the *shew of Wisdom* strikes more upon the fancy and inclination of such Persons, than sober, calm and well-weighed Religion; which seems dull and flat to those who have more warmth and zeal than judgment and discretion. And I do not at all question, but many of the corruptions of the Christian Church came in, from an apprehended necessity of complying with the heat of some over-zealous people; who were not contented with the plain and excellent Religion of Jesus Christ; but they must, as they thought, heighten and improve it, till they had mixed with it the freaks of *Enthusiasm*, or the dotages of *Superstition*.

In the Church of *Rome* there is in many things a *shew of Wisdom*, in *Wall-worship and Humility*, and ne-
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glecting the Body; And in some of our Sects, that seem to abhor *Will-worship* so much, that for fear of it they will not give civil respect to men; yet they pretend to *shew of Wisdom in Humility* and neglecting the Body, but after a different manner: others have a *shew of Wisdom too in a wonderful*, I had almost said, *superstitious* deal against what they call *Will-worship* and *Superstition*. But what is to be done in this Case? How shall we avoid being led aside by such a *shew of Wisdom*, on every side? I shall only lay down some Directions; and so conclude.

(1.) Fix a true Notion of God and the Christian Religion in your minds. If you judge aright of the Divine Nature, it will ease your minds of many uneasie thoughts, troublesome fears and superstitious fancies. He is not capable of being flattered or deceived by us; God is neither taken with outward appearances, nor is he pleased with any thing we do, merely because it is displeasing to our selves, *The righteous God loveth righteousness*; and he is pleased best with the innocency, integrity and holiness of our hearts and lives. And for the Christian Religion, take not your Notion of it from the different and uncertain opinions of Men, but from the Doctrines of Christ and his Apostles. Men do not read the Scriptures as they ought to do, with a design to know their Religi-

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on by them; but to justify what they take to be Religion from them. ^{quod} One would think it were impossible for any one that considered the sayings of Christ or his Apostles, to place his Religion in being for or against any particular Modes or Ceremonies of Worship; whereby he may so easily see that it lies chiefly in an excellent temper of mind, holy, spiritual, humble, calm, peaceable, charitable, and a suitableness of action to this temper. This is so plain and easie to be understood, that he must read the New Testament with a very ill mind, that doth not find it out. And if you have settled this Notion of true Religion, it will be a continual Touchstone about you to judge of all Pretenders.

(2.) Set not an equal value on things that are good in order to other things, that you do upon things that are good in themselves. For the one are but the Instruments of Religion, the other are properly the Duties of it. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, viz. to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.* And this was spoken when very costly Sacrifices were offered instead of it; no less than thousands, and ten thousands; yea the first-born, and the fruit of their Bodies. And therefore God sets a high value on these Duties, and so ought we. No one that hath any sense of Religion can despise the immediate

diate Duties of Divine Worship ; it being a good Saying of *Pythagoras*, mention'd by *Cicero* and *Plutarch*, that we are never better than when we approach to God ; or, as *Cicero* expresses it, when we do *rebus Divinis operam dare*, are employed in the Duties of Divine Worship : But yet to do good is better than Sacrifice, and to forgive an injury than the fat of Rams. It is a wise Observation of *Maimonides*, That the intention of the Law of God is to keep men within the just Bounds of Vertue ; but when men found a stronger inclination to one extreme than to another, they made use of remedies proper to reduce themselves from that extreme, by great severities towards themselves, by Watchings, and extraordinary Fastings, and other hardships : But when Fools saw Wise men do these things, they imagined presently that there was an Excellency in the things themselves, and that if they did the same things, they should pass for very good men, and be highly in the favour of God. Which, saith he, is just like an ignorant Fellow, who observing the Physicians prescribing Physick to his Patients, and forbidding eating to them, and finding them to recover upon it, should presently conclude, that surely it is the best way to live upon Scammony and Aloes, and such like, and to keep himself with the same strictness that was prescribed to the Sick ; which instead

Plutarch de Superst.

Cic. de Legib. l. 2. c. 9.

Porta Mo- sis p. 201.

instead of preventing a Disease, would certainly bring one: so, saith he, do those who use the remedies of diseased minds in a state of health; they spoil a good constitution of their souls, and make it uneasy and troublesome.

(3.) Judge of mens pretences, not by their outward shew and appearance; but by the Spirit and Temper that goes along with them. This was the course the Apostle here took; he regarded not their shew of Wisdom and great appearance of Humility and Mortification; but he pursued these things to their Fountain-Head, and there he found nothing but spiritual pride, and vanity of mind. We must not judge easily nor rashly concerning this; but where the evidence is notorious, we have great reason to sleight and condemn the most sanctimonious appearance, i. e. if there be great uncharitableness and censoriousness towards all who do not comply with them; great scorn and contempt of all other ways but their own; great malice and spight against all who go about to oppose them; where these are, whether in the Church of Rome, or elsewhere, whatever the shew of wisdom be, this wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. But the Wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easie to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

Jam. 3. 15.

Ver. 17.

Lausini

FINIS.

